

Recently I was invited to a large manufacturing facility in Columbus. Walking through the plant, the owner proudly showed me a new machine. The idea is simple - it cuts metal. But it does so in a sophisticated, precise fashion that greatly advances productivity. The owner added, "This machine will help me bring jobs back from China."

It is not only critical to America's economic recovery that we redevelop a strong manufacturing base at home, it's also essential for our national security. The more we untangle ourselves from unsustainable fiscal obligations and foreign indebtedness to unpredictable regimes with authoritarian tendencies, the more secure our nation's future. It's fiscal gut check time in America -- to free ourselves from dangerous levels of debt.

Nebraska is helping lead the way to recapturing our manufacturing strength and shoring up our economy. In northeast Nebraska lies what I like to call the "manufacturing triangle" of Columbus, Norfolk, and Fremont. Each community, similar in size and economic diversity, has a strong industrial base rooted in specialized manufacturing. Columbus, in fact, is often referred to as the "manufacturing capital" of Nebraska, as it lays claim to the title of having the most industry jobs of any community, per capita, in Nebraska.

Across the state, manufacturing's role in on our economy is growing. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Nebraska has added over 3,000 manufacturing jobs since December 2009. Manufacturers in Nebraska now account for almost 12 percent of the total output in the state, employing nearly 10 percent of the workforce. And manufacturing jobs are often quality jobs that support families and contribute greatly to a community's well-being. Manufacturing compensation is typically 34 percent higher than other non-farm jobs.

Nebraska's central location, proximity to raw commodities and natural resources, and skilled workforce make manufacturing a natural fit here. We must continue leveraging these strengths to grow our state's capacity for smart growth in manufacturing. Innovations like those I saw in Columbus will help us keep moving forward.

Our state economy has weathered the national recession due to our strong agricultural base, the entrepreneurial spirit of our people, and an ingrained focus on personal responsibility and community. This "Nebraska model" – as it now embraces the renewal of manufacturing as a key step in economic revitalization – will be critical to strengthening America's economic security and national security for generations to come.